

The Smithsonian Plan for the *Enola Gay*:

A Report on the Revisions

The *Enola Gay*, the B-29 that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in August 1945, has never been displayed to the public. Next year will be the fiftieth anniversary of its famous mission. The National Air and Space Museum of the Smithsonian Institution is completing preparations to show the *Enola Gay* in an exhibit that will open in May 1995. The plan, however, is to present the aircraft as part of an emotionally-charged program about the atomic bomb.

The broad outlines of the exhibit plan have been known for some time. World War II veterans have been expressing their objections to the museum for years, but the issue did not receive wide notice until April 1994, when *Air Force Magazine* published an article entitled "War Stories at Air and Space."¹ Since then, veterans have bombarded Congress with complaints. Extensive news media coverage² soon added pressure to the controversy.

The primary focus of *Air Force Magazine*'s report was a 559-page exhibition script, completed by the museum in January. We drew as well on a series of previous planning documents for the exhibition, an interview with the museum director, and a body of statements and letters from museum officials over the years.

¹ A copy of that article is appended to this report for reference. A longer, fully-annotated version (published March 15, 1994) is also available, as is a supplementary content analysis prepared April 7.

² Including *Time Magazine*, the Associated Press, *The Washington Post*, *The Washington Times*, Knight-Ridder and Media-General news services, and numerous others. Japanese, French, and German media have covered the story as well.

The position of the Air Force Association and *Air Force Magazine* has been that the planned exhibit was fundamentally lacking in balance and context. The curators picked up the story of the war in 1945 as the end approached. Their script depicted the Japanese as defenders of homeland and emperor but provided little background on Japan's earlier aggression, which had made such a defense necessary. In this telling of it, the Americans were cast as ruthless invaders, driven by revenge.

Smithsonian officials have consistently disparaged — in public, at least — *Air Force Magazine's* report as inaccurate, unfair, and misleading. Privately, however, museum officials had re-examined their plans and came to a much different conclusion. Dr. Martin Harwit, Director of the National Air and Space Museum, told the museum staff³ that he had "evidently paid greater attention to accuracy than to balance" in his initial reading of the script. "A second reading shows that we do have a lack of balance and that much of the criticism that has been levied against us is understandable," he said.

1. The New Script

A revised script was completed May 31. Honoring a commitment made during a radio debate June 2,⁴ the museum provided a copy of the new script to *Air Force Magazine* on June 23. The exhibition has been retitled and is now called "The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II." This report is based on my study of the new script and a line-by-line comparison of it with the previous script.⁵

- The revised script contains a number of commendable changes, but the extent of the revision is far less than we had expected.
- The changes consist of point additions and deletions that do not, in the aggregate, shift the mass of the exhibit appreciably. The plan is still unbalanced. It does not provide adequate historical context for understanding the events of August 1945.
- It is still a partisan interpretation that I believe many Americans — and most veterans — will find objectionable.

The reasons behind these conclusions will be illustrated rather emphatically by three parts of the analysis:

³ "Harwit, "Comments on *Crossroads*," April 16, 1994.

⁴ "On the Mark," WAVA, Arlington, Va. (Mark Gilman, moderator, Dr. Tom D. Crouch and John T. Correll, participants).

⁵ "The Crossroads: The End of World War II, the Atomic Bomb, and the Origins of the Cold War," January 12, 1994.

Casualties in the Pacific War.

AFA's criticism of the previous script said that the emphasis on Japanese suffering was so strong that visitors to the exhibit might well perceive Japan as the victim — rather than as the aggressor — in the Pacific war. In his April commentary, Dr. Harwit stated a similar conclusion. He said that "We talk of the heavy bombing of Tokyo (100-32, 33),⁶ show great empathy for Japanese mothers (100-34), but are strangely quiet about similar losses to Americans. . . ." He suggested that the curators "put in an equal number of pictures of death and suffering in section 200 for soldiers on both sides."

<u>January Script</u>	<u>Revised Script</u>	
49	32	Photos of Japanese casualties.
3	7	Photos of American casualties.

Some adjustments were made to the script, but the effect of the revisions was to reduce this particular imbalance from 94 percent to 82 percent — a definite improvement, but still a long way from balance:

REFERENCES (Jan). Japan: 100 14, 35; 400 1(4), 12, 13(2), 21, 22(5), 25(3), 27(2), 29(4), 31, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38(2), 41(3), 42(3), 43, 44, 45, 52(2), 56(3), 59, 65(2). US: 100 10, 24; 200 55.

REFERENCES (Rev). Japan: 100 17; 400 13(4), 14, 15(2), 20, 23(3), 24, 25, 30, 31, 32, 36(2), 37(4), 38, 39, 48(2), 50, 53(2), 55, 59. US: 100 9, 14, 17, 24, 42; 200 56(2).

"Ground Zero" Visual Images.

As we had reported, the curators planned for "the emotional center" of the exhibition to be Exhibition Unit 4, "Ground Zero: Hiroshima, 8:15 a.m., August 6, 1945; Nagasaki, 11:02 a.m., August 9, 1945." Because of the images in this section, the first line on the first page of the previous script warned that "This exhibit contains graphic photographs of the horrors of war. Parental discretion is advised." (*That warning has been eliminated in the revised script — even though most of the graphic images remain.*)

In his April 16 commentary, Dr. Harwit appeared to share some of our concerns about this part of the program. "Section 400 has far too many explicit, horrible pictures," he said, and suggested

⁶ References are to sections and page numbers of the script. The annotation system in Dr. Harwit's April 16 commentary is similar to the one used in AFA's April 7 analysis, in which 400 1 (4) indicated script section 400, page 1, four items.

the staff "take out all but about one third of the explicit pictures of death and suffering in section 400." As the following chart shows, that did not happen.

January	June	"Ground Zero" Visual Images
75	64	Total Photos
49	37	"Human Suffering" Photos
26 ▶ 16 ▶ 10	24 ▶ 16 ▶ 8	Total Artifacts ▶ object-related ▶ person-related
25	23	Photos featuring women, children, religious objects.
13	12	Artifacts related to women, children, religious objects.

Seventy-five percent of the "human suffering" photos are still included. Ninety-two percent of the artifacts remain. The graphic emphasis on women, children, and mutilated religious objects — cited in our April report — is almost the same as before.

REFERENCES (JUNE REV). Women and Children: 400 14(2), 15(3), 20, 23 (2), 30(2), 31(2), 33, 38, 39, 50, 53(2), 55, 57(2). Religious objects: 400 10(2), 19, 27(2), 28, 34, 58(2).

Item of Note: Our previous report cited as an example of emotional loading the intention to display a Hiroshima schoolgirl's lunchbox with remains of peas and rice reduced to carbon. This artifact was specifically described in 10 lines of text in the previous script. (400 32) Specific reference to this item is deleted in the new script, although there is an entry at the corresponding point (400 31) for a "Hiroshima lunchbox — label copy to be provided." This is almost surely the same artifact, without the descriptive detail that drew criticism last time.

Emphasis on Japanese Suffering.

The emphasis on Japanese suffering is further seen in the number of text pages and photos devoted to that theme. (The revised script has a total of 295 text pages, compared to 302 text pages in the January version.)

<u>Text Pages</u>	<u>Photos</u>	
58	64	Hiroshima/Nagasaki "Ground Zero."
21	28	Previous bombing of Japan.
5	5	Hardship/deprivation on Japanese home front.

REFERENCES: "Ground Zero": 400 1-58; Previous bombing: 100 30, 34-39, 53-54, 200 45, 300 10-16, 23, 25-27, 48; Hardship: 100 48-51, 56.

By contrast — and demonstrating our point about the lack of context — the new script devotes less than one page (100 5) and only eight visual images (100 7-9) to Japanese military activity prior to 1945. The script lays virtually no groundwork about Japan's drive for conquest in the 1930s or popular support for the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" that was on the verge of making the Pacific a Japanese lake by the 1940s.

2. Changes of Specific Note

■ Copyright notice. The cover page of the new script adds a copyright notice and specifically forbids photocopying the document without written permission from the Smithsonian Institution. It is unknown whether this restriction was applied because the Air Force Association did photocopy the previous script and made it available to veterans, news media, and Congress. AFA believes that plans for a controversial exhibit in a public museum, funded mostly by public money, should be open for public review. AFA will, however, abide by the restriction applied and regrets that it cannot furnish copies of the script to interested parties.

■ New material that helps.

▶ "War in Asia and the Pacific: 1937-1945," (100 7-9) adds eight graphic elements: photos of a Chinese baby in the ruins of a Japanese air raid on Shanghai, the carnage from the 1937 "Rape of Nanking," the US fleet under attack at Pearl Harbor (2 photos, ships burning, exploding), an "Avenge December 7" poster, and photos of the Bataan Death March, Marines after the fighting on Eniwetok, and a burial at sea.

▶ Added (100 42) to the section on "Home Front USA" are three photos — a Gold Star mother who lost her sons, a death notice telegram, and a letter of consolation — and a flag used in the burial of a Navy Seabee.

▶ The strongest single element that has been added is a photo (300 21) of an kneeling Australian flyer, about to be beheaded in August 1945 after Japan had surrendered.

■ The "War of Vengeance." The January script included the following assertion, which the Air Force Association and others found to be especially offensive:

"For most Americans, this war was fundamentally different than the one waged against Germany and Italy — it was a war of vengeance. For most Japanese, it was a war to defend their unique culture against western imperialism." (100 5)

Asked about this by a reporter, Dr. Tom D. Crouch, Chairman of the museum's Aeronautics Department, acknowledged, "That's not a good sentence." The reporter understood that the lines were likely to be changed or eliminated in the revision, although Dr. Crouch believed the initial assertion was valid. "By then [the summer of 1945], the spirit of vengeance was pretty strong in the United States. And the Japanese had reached the point where they knew they were not going to win the war, and all they wanted to do was preserve national sovereignty."⁷

The "War of Vengeance" assertion was modified and reads as follows in the revised script:

"For most Americans, this war was different from the one waged against Germany and Italy: it was a war to defeat a vicious aggressor, but also a war to punish Japan for Pearl Harbor and for the brutal treatment of Allied prisoners. For most Japanese, what had begun as a war of imperial conquest had become a battle to save their nation from destruction." (100 5-6)

3. A Tilt That Persists

Defining characteristics of the museum's plan include the unilateral emphasis on Japanese suffering in the war, the excessive use of provocative "ground zero" pictures and artifacts, and the slight attention paid to events prior to 1945. Other elements, however, add to the distinctive ideological tilt of the plan.

□ **Selective Presentation of Consequences.** The final section of the script, "The Legacy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki," adds a wall label (500 11) quoting a former soldier who says he and

⁷ Kuznik, "Bombs Away!," *Washington City Paper*, April 8, 1994.

his colleagues heard the news of the atomic bomb with "relief and joy" because their lives would not be at risk in an invasion of Japan. (No photo is indicated.) We welcome the inclusion, of course, but this eight-line wall label is all the exhibit says about the invasion that no longer needed to happen. In the same section of the script, greater attention goes to the postwar antinuclear movement (e.g., 500 19), complete with "Ban the Bomb" buttons, other artifacts, and peace demonstration photos.

□ **An Attitude of Imbalance.** The script is interspersed with a series of "Historical Controversies": Would the Bomb Have Been Dropped on the Germans? Did the Demand for Unconditional Surrender Prolong the War? How Important Was the Soviet Factor in the "Decision to Drop the Bomb"?⁸ Was a Warning or Demonstration Possible? Was an Invasion Inevitable Without the Bomb? Was the Decision to Drop the Bomb Justified?

A recurring undertone in the plans and scripts for this exhibit has been suspicion about why the United States used the atomic bomb. Museum officials have seemed reluctant to accept the explanation that it was a military action, taken to end the war and save lives. Some of the speculation on this point has been removed in the latest revision, but the script lingers respectfully on such individuals as nuclear scientist Leo Szilard, who protested the use of the bomb.

As the "Historical Controversies" listed above indicate, nearly all of the doubts and suspicions are directed at the United States. The Japanese are shown repeatedly in a quest for peace, and aggressiveness on their side is depicted as the province of a few military fanatics. The revised script eliminates a statement in the previous version (200 27) saying that prior to 1945, Emperor Hirohito "showed much enthusiasm for the armed forces and their conquests."

The new script, like the last one, avoids showing warlike images of the Japanese armed forces. One of the few exceptions is the section on the *Kamikaze* (100 19-23), who are treated with near-mystical reverence. They are seen facing certain death bravely as their comrades and school children cheer their selflessness. Indeed, they are the only military members on either side who appear in heroic roles in this exhibit.

REFERENCES: Controversies: 200 16, 31, 39, 50, 57, 67; Szilard: 200 5, 46-47); Japanese Quest: 200 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31.

■ **The Internment issue.** Our April 7 analysis reported that the exhibit script allotted two text pages to the internment of Japanese-Americans in the United States compared to one paragraph

⁸ The quotation marks are a telltale (and no doubt inadvertent) leftover from the previous script, which speculated (200 21, 39) that it was not so much a decision as a foregone conclusion -- that President Truman and his advisers ignored alternatives to the bomb and proceeded with its use for diplomatic reasons.

on Japanese treatment of American prisoners of war. In his April 16 commentary, Dr. Harwit added that "We do not note that conditions in the American internment camps were far more favorable than in Japanese internment camps, where slave labor conditions prevailed." The balance is adjusted in the new script, although the comparison of conditions is not explicitly drawn. There is no coverage at all of Japanese "internment" of American *civilians*, such as occurred at the notorious Santo Tomás prison compound in Manila.

The internment of Japanese Americans still commands a prominent place (100 44-45) in the section on "Home Front USA." This entry has been edited down in the revision, but a new label directs visitors to another exhibition, "A More Perfect Union" in the Museum of American history, for more information on the wartime treatment of Japanese-Americans.⁹

□ **View of the postwar world.** The final "Legacy" section of the exhibit gives a single line — preceded with a dismissive "on the other hand" — to the proposition that "nuclear deterrence may have ensured for the first time that wars between the great powers were no longer possible." (500 21) This concept is worth far more than a throwaway line. This is one of many instances where the curators seem either to not understand or to have light regard for military perspectives in an exhibition on a military subject.¹⁰

The attention of this final section of the exhibit is on other things. It concentrates on the nuclear arms race, radiation effects of nuclear weapons, the rise of the anti-nuclear movement, nuclear waste and contamination, and the curators' perspective on Mutual Assured Destruction, or MAD.

Another theme of this "postwar" section is to show the American victors celebrating merrily in contrast to the anguish and suffering of the defeated Japanese.

4. What the Military Historians Really Said.

Time and again, museum officials have left the impression that any imbalance is in the eye of *Air Force Magazine* and that the exhibition is supported by the historians of the armed forces. A standard element in such remarks is to prominently identify Dr. Richard Hallion, Historian of the

⁹ That exhibition, keyed to the 200th anniversary of the US Constitution, generated great controversy when it opened. See our previous report, "War Stories at Air and Space." The curator of "A More Perfect Union" was Dr. Tom D. Crouch, now head of the Aeronautics Department at the National Air and Space Museum.

¹⁰ According to Dr. Crouch in the WAVA radio debate June 2, the script was written by four persons, none of them veterans of military service. In his May 26 memorandum to Ned Humphreys, Dr. Crouch said the individual incorporating changes into the script was the exhibition curator, Dr. Michael Neufeld. Dr. Neufeld is a Canadian whose background is in European economic history.

Air Force, as a member of the museum's advisory committee, followed by a statement that the committee is supportive of the museum's plan.

Dr. Harwit wrote in April, for example, that "I believe I am not putting words into the committee members' mouths in saying that the unanimous response was that our exhibition plans were well informed, accurate, and responsible."¹¹ Smithsonian Secretary Adams, writing to Rep. G. V. "Sonny" Montgomery to dispel "misinformation and unfounded rumor," said that "The script has been carefully scrutinized for accuracy and balance by a committee of some of the nation's leading scholars, including Dr. Richard Hallion, Chief of the U.S.A.F. Center for Air Force History."¹² In the course of a radio debate, Dr. Crouch said that some of the service historians — specifically the historian of the Air Force — had endorsed the exhibit.¹³

Dr. Hallion, speaking for himself, gives a different assessment: "The exhibit as currently structured is not one we would have done. We feel that though the museum has made considerable progress over its original concepts, it still needs to show that the central issue behind dropping the bomb was shortening the war and possibly saving upwards of 500,000 Allied troops."¹⁴

Writing to a veteran who inquired, Dr. Hallion said that "The bottom line is that Harwit and his two curators, Crouch and Neufeld, came under heavy pressures (as you know) because the *Enola Gay* exhibit script was not in balance nor context. As a result, Harwit has formed a new committee to revise the script so that it doesn't seem that America was the aggressor in the Pacific!"¹⁵ Referring to the January version of the script, Dr. Hallion reported that the professional historians of the armed forces "unanimously consider it a poor script, lacking balance and context."¹⁶

Museum Director Harwit was well aware of this reaction from the services. Writing to a special group he had appointed to work on revisions, he said that "a team of historians from different branches of the military" had "expressed dissatisfaction with the script's overall balance. In their

¹¹ Letter to Nicks, April 6, 1994.

¹² April 12, 1994.

¹³ "On the Mark," WAVA, June 2, 1994.

¹⁴ In editor's note, following "Harwit Responds," Letters column, *Air Force Magazine*, May 1994.

¹⁵ Hallion, letter to Ben Nicks, April 29, 1994.

¹⁶ Hallion, memorandum to Kicklighter, April 19.

opinion, it was flawed in its portrayal of Japanese and American history, activities, and customs."¹⁷

5. Other Opinions. There has been some suggestion also that objections to the Smithsonian's plans for the *Enola Gay* are limited to *Air Force Magazine* and a small number of individual veterans. That is hardly the case.

In May, the national executive committee of the American Legion adopted a resolution strongly objecting "to the use of the *Enola Gay* and the heroic men who flew her in an exhibit which questions the moral and political wisdom involved in the dropping of the atomic bomb and which infers that America was somehow in the wrong and her loyal airmen somehow criminal in carrying out this last act of the war which, in fact, hastened the war's end and preserved the lives of countless Americans and Japanese alike."¹⁸ In June, the Air Force Sergeants Association presented its first-ever "Freedom Award" to Brig. Gen. Paul Tibbets, USAF, Ret., pilot of the *Enola Gay*, and special awards to surviving members of the crew. W. Burr Bennett of Northbrook, Ill., unofficial coordinator for a group of World War II veterans concerned about the *Enola Gay*, said that through June 27, 1994, he and his colleagues had collected 9,870 signatures on petitions of protest to the Smithsonian.

Since the publication of the Air Force Association and *Air Force Magazine* reports three months ago, the letters and telephone calls supporting our position have not stopped.

General Tibbets, the pilot of the famous B-29, says that the "proposed display of the *Enola Gay* is a package of insults." How does he believe the National Air and Space Museum should exhibit it? "Like the Smithsonian displays any other airplane," he says. "Look at Lindbergh's airplane. There it sits, or hangs, all by itself in all its glory. 'Here is the first airplane to fly the Atlantic [solo].' Okay. 'This airplane was the first one to drop an atomic bomb.' You don't need any other explanation. And I think it should be displayed alone."¹⁹

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¹⁷ Harwit, memo to "Tiger Team" review group, April 26, 1994.

¹⁸ "Smithsonian Exhibit of the *Enola Gay*," American Legion Resolution No. 22, May 1994.

¹⁹ News conference, June 9, 1994.

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